



Day of the Dead

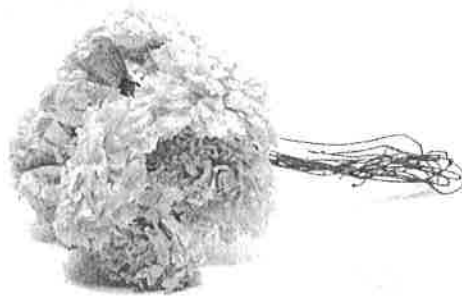
Day of the Dead, **Día de los Muertos** [DEE-ah day lohhs MWEHR-tohs], is a holiday celebrated on November 1st (All Saints Day) and November 2nd (All Souls Day) in Mexico, and in some parts of Central and South America. Day of the Dead is also celebrated by many Mexican Americans in the United States. The Mexican American population is one of the fastest growing groups in the United States, especially in California, Texas, and New York.

In Mexico, this festival is considered to be one of the most important holidays of the year. Although it is associated with the dead, the holiday is not portrayed or thought of as morbid or depressing, rather it is a joyous celebration reminding us to enjoy life while we can because death can catch us at any time. It is a time to celebrate and honor the lives of loved ones who have died. Death is not an end but rather a beginning to a new stage in life.



People celebrate Day of the Dead constructing and decorating **ofrendas** [OH-fren-dahs] or home altars, to honor loved ones who have died. Decorations may include **copal** incense, candles, gifts, bright flowers, **papel picado** [pah-PEHL pee-KAH-doh], pictures of saints, and photographs and offerings of the deceased's favorite food and drink. In rural areas of Mexico, tombs and gravestones in cemeteries are cleaned and freshly painted and on November 2nd, family members visit the gravesites of their loved ones. They decorate graves with flowers, and enjoy picnics consisting of favorite foods of the

deceased. Most families will celebrate in the cemetery all night, picnicking, singing, laughing, and remembering their loved ones.



There are many special foods and decorations that are prepared especially during this time. Sweet breads called **Pan de Muerto** [PAHN DAY MWEHR-tohs] (bread of the dead)—a round bread decorated with shapes of skulls and crossbones—and **Mona bread** (doll bread)—shaped like a person lying with their arms folded across their chests—are baked. **Calacas** [kah-LAH-cahs] or skeletons made of papier-mâché, clay, wood or paper wear modern dress and depict subjects from everyday life such as bicycle riders, brides and grooms, musicians, even pets. These can be placed on ofrendas to depict what the deceased used to enjoy doing. Sweet skulls made of sugar, called **calaveras** [kah-lah-VAY-rahs] are given as gifts. It is common to find names of the dead, or even the living, painted on the sugar skulls as a funny gift. The traditional flower of Day of the Dead is the **marigold**, which is spread on paths and used to decorate ofrendas and the cemetery. The pleasant aromas of foods, copal incense, and marigolds help attract and guide the souls home.

Vocabulary Words

Día de los Muertos	Spanish for the Mexican holiday Day of the Dead.
Ofrendas	Altars constructed to honor loved ones during the Day of the Dead holiday.
Copal Incense	Tree resin that when burnt produces a sweet smell believed to guide spirits of the dead back home during Day of the Dead.
Papel Picado	Mexican colorful cut paper (can also be plastic) banners used to decorate homes, shops, and streets.
Pan de Muerto	A round bread for Day of the Dead decorated with bone shapes and sprinkled with sesame seeds or sugar.
Mona Bread	A special bread for Day of the Dead shaped like a person lying with their arms folded across their chests and decorated with red sugar.
Marigold	The traditional flower of Day of the Dead.
Calacas	Skeletons depicting subjects from everyday life.
Calavera	Literally means “skull” in Spanish, but it is also used to refer to a lot of things relating to the dead: songs, poems, drawings, candy skulls, and more.
Calavera Poems	A satirical or funny poem describing a person’s death.
Jose Guadalupe Posada	Famous Mexican engraver and illustrator known for his skeleton drawings and prints.
La Catrina	Artist Jose Guadalupe Posada’s most famous engraving depicting a female skeleton dressed in fancy clothes.